

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are frontline public health workers who are trusted, integral members of their community or who have an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the CHW to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery. CHWs are trained to provide accurate health related information to fellow community members in order to empower them to gain control of their health. The CHW model has been repeatedly shown an effective, low-cost method of healthcare delivery and use of the model is continually expanding. Areas in which CHWs have been shown effective at improving health outcomes include asthma, diabetes, HIV, heart disease and breast cancer, to name a few. The repeated documentation of the impact CHWs have had and continue to have on the health of the communities they serve speaks to the importance of expanding the model's implementation to improve the state of healthcare in Illinois.

The Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI), of the Sinai Health System in Chicago, IL is a community based research organization that has been implementing the CHW model for the past 13 years on their asthma, diabetes and breast cancer awareness interventions. SUHI has amassed extensive experience utilizing CHWs to deliver health education, assist clients in navigating the health care system, improve community outreach, and connect clients with appropriate referrals for legal, housing and social service needs. As one example of the many successful outcomes, the endeavors of the SUHI asthma program have resulted in 50-75% declines in asthma-related emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations, and statistically and clinically significant improvements in asthma-related quality of life. Furthermore, these initiatives have saved an average of \$7 per dollar invested. SUHI not only conducts interventions, but has integrated the CHW model into the Sinai Health System by developing a sound system for hiring, training, and evaluating CHWs, creating a CHW position ladder, implementing CHW monthly meetings, and other such methods of empowering the CHW workforce. SUHI also conducts research on the topic of CHW-model implementation in health care centers, which has guided their delineation of CHW effectiveness and best practices in terms of evidence-based science.